787 which the god speaks. In the brotherhoods of which we shall presently speak, the wara-mina-den' is, as the term indicates, "possessed by the god"; he is also said to be "the mouth of the god" (wara da). However, the diviner can speak only unin-
[198] telligible gibberish during trance, and so this half-human, half-divine language must be interpreted by the wara-tigi or high-priest.

During dream or divine possession, the invisible is brought within man's reach by a sort of inner illumination; both methods may be said to be intuitive divination. Other methods, even more widely used, are based on a different procedure. These methods purport to penetrate the divine intention and will by observation of external signs. How do these signs differ from natural phenomena?

The native pays very little attention to what we call
[811] natural laws. He reasons by analogy and attributes any unfamiliar phenomenon to an invisible being endowed like himself with intelligence and will. The indications of this will are not precise, and it is up to each person to recognize and to interpret them. Divination based on external signs may be called deductive. The signs may be classified in two categories: those involving living beings and those involving inanimate objects.

787 Living beings. Theoretically, any animal is useful for
825 purposes of observation because its actions, whose determining cause is unknown to the ordinary man, reveal to the seer the divine will or intervention.

Observations of this kind have given rise to many taboos (tne). Here is an example: while crossing a [135] stream an ancestor of the Samaké was caught by a crocodile and carried down through the water to the creature's lair, where he was abandoned. It happened that the man was merely stunned and when he came to, he pondered how he might escape. Suddenly he felt some grains of sand fall on his face and, seeking the source, noticed that a thread of light came in through a tiny fissure in the rock. The grains of sand were coming through this crack, and he realized that an ant lion (gere) was throwing them in an effort to show him how to get out; so he managed to enlarge the crack enough to escape. But, remembering the insect to

752 "A few days after the child's death, a woman in the house was also bitten, just a step from my hut and by a similar snake. Old Niany was summoned and came at once. I was not aware that he had any knowledge of medical matters but, on seeing the confidence shown him, I realized that this was not a new experience for him.

"His medication consisted, first, of ridiculous gestures and a spate of incoherent words spoken very rapidly. Then he brought out from under his boubou [robe] a small horn containing a black and oily ointment. The injured woman, who seemed very calm, prepared her own bandage and placed the ointment on the wound, adding some ground root which the old man took from another horn. When she had finished, it was Niany's turn. He muttered some more words, put his finger into his ears and took out some stuff, which was apparently there in quantity, and carefully spread it over the ointment. The woman then arose and returned to her work.

"I watched this treatment with a lively interest since I knew that I myself might have need of it at any time. For the same reason I often asked after the woman and was always told that she was getting on well. On the third day, I was told that she was completely cured and that there had been no swelling or pain to keep her from performing her usual chores.

"The snake that had bitten her was nevertheless of [145] the same type as the one that had caused the child's death. I saw and held in my hands both snakes; I saw the remedy applied and I have faithfully described it. Are we to believe in the virtue of grigri and in the omniscience of the Aesculapius of Foutobi, or must we give an unorthodox twist to the aphorism which says that faith conquers all?

"In any case, I firmly resolved to trust myself to the learned hands of Niany if the need should arise.

"When I went to Niany to congratulate him on his remarkable cure, I reminded him of the death of the child who had been treated in the same way. The singular logic of the blacksmith's reply has no doubt been encountered before: 'that's not at all strange,' he told me, 'since my remedy cures only those who believe in it and the little child did not believe.' "....

The Soul of an African People
The Bambara
Their Psychic, Ethical, Religious, and Social Life

/12/ Chapter 1

1. Beliefs Concerning the Forces of Nature

181 It would seem child's play to demonstrate to a Negro the absurdity of his prejudices and his superstitious practices; yet such a demonstration does not suceed. No matter how clear and simple your arguments may be, you will not succeed in bringing into his mind the least spark of light or the slightest doubt. The o do, "that's it," and tigné, "that's true," which spring so readily from the mouth of one whose eyes you try to open, are polite sayings, and nothing more.

There is no reason to be surprised. Being incapable of long meditation and broad reasoning, he does not grasp the illogicality of his beliefs and, the contradictions in his behavior; he believes what his fathers believed and, like them, he sacrifices, so that everything with which he comes in contact is reddened slightly with blood. Your talk at once surprises him and leaves him cold; he does not understand you or grasp what you say; he even finds you a little silly. If he does not dare to admit this feeling to himself he stops with the words: Toubabou do! (This is a white man! Can he think and judge as I myself judge?").

In addition, his beliefs are linked to one another, and if we are able to get down to his level, taking care all the while to raise him to ours, if we judge as he judges and think as he thinks, we will move from surprise to surprise, more than ever, for his conception of the world and ours are not at all the same, and his mentality and ours are different from each other.

181 811 772 Every non-Mohammedan Bambara considers himself a close relative of animals and plants and, I may add with all assurance /13/, a close relative of inanimate things. Without any doubt he distinguishes

181 the kingdoms from each other; for him a mineral is not a vegetable
811 nor a vegetable an animal. He differentiates between the animate
772 and the inanimate and does not confuse the genera and species. But has he known how to establish a definite, clear, and well-demarcated line of distinction between man and the rest of creation? No, he bases his ideas of all things on himself or, to be more definite, on what he feels and believes himself to be. In addition to genii and spirits, he sees conscious forces and energies everywhere in nature. He cannot define these forces; his ideas on the subject are confused and indefinite. But, nevertheless, it is true, that he attributes a glimmer of reason and feeling to everything. Obviously the black man does not attribute a soul -- in the sense that we understand it -- to everything; nor does he say that everything is the home of a genie or a spirit; yet he cannot conceive of pure matter. He finds instinct in animals and special virtues and properties in plants. In inert matter he encounters phenomena which he cannot explain, and since he always uses himself and his reasoning as the basis of comparisons, he endows everything with the immaterial, invisible, imperceptible attributes of reason and feeling. In his mind I repeat, matter is not a soul, or a genie as he conceives of one; yet it is a being, a force, a power that has its own existence and the ability to act of its own accord. Here are a few examples taken from a thousand:

811 In July, 1908 at the time when the crops were sprouting, cer-
731 tain regions of the Ségou circle were invaded by tiny caterpillars
782 measuring barely 0.025 meters in length. They were a beautiful
825 velvety black with pale green lines on their sides; they came from the east out of no one knows where and myriads of them proceeded toward the west in serried ranks. Wherever they passed everything was eaten, and the eleusine /African millet/, corn, and sorghum had to be resown.

While these creatures were devouring the crops, the Moslem cried his insignificant formula toward the east and repeated, "God is great." He prostrated himself, crouched on his heels, devoutly shaking his forefinger, but all was in vain, for the quivering black wave continued to draw back on itself, to hump its back, and then to grow longer /14/; it continued to advance and to grow. The pagan

81 whitened the front of his dwelling with a mixture of millet flour and
731 water that had been offered to the shades of his ancestors, and poured
782 chicken blood here and there; then he thought it best to meet in
835 council and consult his sorcerers. The same orders were given everywhere: a potentate, perhaps a prince, doubtless of the caterpillar people, was celebrating his wedding and respects must be paid to him. All the pagan villages did so, and the marriage of the caterpillars took place one fine morning at daybreak. Two or three caterpillars were placed at the bottom of old worn-out gourds and carried far up a path on the west side and out of the village by a procession of women and girls, singing and dancing, and preceded by furiously beating drums. They placed the little creatures on a spot determined by the elders and, after a wild dance they made their farewells, foolish farewells, stupid perhaps and yet nevertheless touching. For if the young people called to them with a long burst of laughter: "I na somaon fo (you will greet your people)," and some old shrews in a tone of command cried: "Ta so! (Go home!)," there were more who said to them: "Toumouni (little caterpillar), an bi déli (we implore you) have pity on us, go back now to your kingdoms; everything is eaten, and there is nothing left. Go, bring greetings to the people of your family, greet them all and greet them well."

They continued to come through for at least eight days, but their number decreased and a storm came and swept them away. Every Bambara will tell you that these caterpillars do not talk, that they have no soul. And yet if you try to make him understand that he has rendered them futile, useless, childish honors and that they could neither enjoy his music and songs nor understand his prayers and supplications, he will shrug his shoulders: "Tigné o (you are right)," he will tell you with a mocking air, and cutting your talk short will add: "Ou tara!", and one who knows the Bambara will guess the full implication: "Nevertheless, they left."

In August, 1908 a large part of the population of the villages
825 located in the environs of Ségou spent the day of Friday the twenty-
787 eighth in sweet idleness. Since I knew that a Kono fetish brought by its masters to recruit initiates was going from village /15/ to

825 village, I thought at first that here lay the reason for this rest, extraor-
787 dinary during the time of the most intensive hoeing. Not at all; the
pagan Bambara were resting, and the women were giving their hus-
[262] bands and children dégé (millet flour mixed with milk and honey
water) in obedience to a hyena's command. The hyena, it was said
-- and all the sorcerers confirmed this -- had emerged from its dumb-
ness, its tongue had been loosed, and it had predicted to the people
of the west that a plague even more terrible than that of the cater-
pillars would descend on the country. Only one means to avert it
remained: to refrain from going to the fields on Friday and to treat
themselves to dégé, the food so dear to Moslems.

482 On my excursions I have often met men and women carrying
757 on their heads a gourd or a basket containing a handful of leaves or
824 some bundles of roots, and apart from the customary greetings it
784 has been impossible for me to get a word out of them. And why this
silence? They were carrying a medicinal plant, a remedy which
would lose all its virtue and all its efficacy if they conversed on the
way, and they had to take care not to trample such-and-such a plant
that grew on the edge of the path.

757 The Bambara quite readily names the plants and herbs whose
753 curative powers are known to him, and yet in the presence of a sick
784 person he will very seldom give you the name of the remedy the
latter is taking, or the names of the roots and leaves that make up
his poultices. Sickness, he believes is a force, a power which tortures
our bodies. He is afraid that in naming the remedy he would pro-
vide this power with a weapon against its healing virtue, which is
another force or power. He sets the second power against the first
to make it leave.

811 It is evident that he attributes bits of reason and emotion to
784 everything, that he attributes human feelings to all that is animate
and inanimate. The "taboos" are not merely one piece of evidence
of this, they are an irrefutable proof of this attitude.

Legend of the Samaké

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My grandfather has often told it to me; he himself got it from his ancestors.... A Samaké -- I cannot tell whether he had been fording the river or driving the stakes to which fishing mats are fastened -- was seized by an alligator which dragged him to the depths of its den. The alligator did not kill him, /21/ for it had fed.... Leaving the unhappy man to his sad thoughts, it withdrew.... It did not go away, however, and from time to time it hit the water with its tail at the entrance of the hole, making it quite clear that there was only one way out and that this was the door. Stretched out in the ooze, the unhappy Samaké moaned: "Who will save me from those terrible claws and those powerful teeth?" An ant lion at the top of the den was watching for flies and ants in the bottom of its pit; it had pity on the man and, working with its two horns, succeeded in bringing in a ray of sunlight to revive the hopes of the Samaké. "Will I be saved?" he asked the ant lion. Two pinches of sand were the answer, and he understood. Working with both hands, he helped the ant lion; the hole grew and he was able to get through. He escaped. When the alligator re-entered its den, exhausted with hunger, it was disappointed not to find its prey there. So as not to invite the curse of their ancestor, the descendants of this Samaké respect and venerate the géré, or ant lion, and it is their tné. Other Samaké have the elephant (sama) for their tné.

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These few legends are sufficient; they all show us that although the Bambara believes that the bond with the tné is simply one of fraternity, friendship, and gratitude and not a bond of real and physical kinship, he nonetheless does not fail to attribute reason and emotion to everything around him, to animals and to plants. In nature he does not find pure matter; rather he attributes human feelings in some degree to everything, and throughout he sees a force, a power, an intangible, which he does not know how to define and which thinks, loves, laments, and weeps.

771 If the Bambara have fought to safeguard their independence,
181 they have done so primarily to preserve their faith and keep their fetishes. They have shown such great attachment for these, that their
[101] conquerors have described them as rebels and applied to them the epithet Bamba, synonym of Kafri. These religious struggles in themselves allow us to state as an indisputable fact that before the arrival of the Moslems the Bambara were animistic and sacrificed to genii. /69/

776 Did they have an exact and precise idea of their genii as they
●811 do now? Apparently yes, for they always reasoned using themselves as a basis of comparison so that in their minds the invisible, impalpable genii to whom they sacrificed had a striking resemblance to man. It is not a man, and yet it is one, they say unable to define their concept or idea, ma si fa do (1).

1. Ma; "man"; si fa' "certain kind"; do; "it is."

776 The Moslem word djin translates this idea precisely, and the
782 Bambara use it in everyday language; but when the day of the sacrifice comes, they become unaware of it and there remains only one word -- ma, meaning "man." When they redden with blood the bark of
[824] the baobab (Adansonia digitata), the tamarind tree, the false cedar (family of the cedrelaceae), etc., to obtain the good graces and protection of the genie who dwells there, they always confer on it the title ma ("man"), and never that of djiné. "Ma n'zira ba, ma n'tomi ba, ma djala ba; O great baobab man, O great tamarind tree man, O great false-cedar man!" begins the formula used by the sacrificer in offering victims and millet flour to the genie (2). They also have

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2. In /J. Henry/, "Culte des esprits chez les Bambara /Spirit Worship among the Bambara/," Anthropos, Vol. III, No. 4 (1908), p. 1 /p. 702/, note 1, there is an error in translation.